This is a post-peer-review, pre-copyedit version of an article published in *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*. The final authenticated version is available online at:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11017-017-9403-2

Dealing with the other between the ethical and the moral: albinism on the African continent

Elvis Imafidon,
Ambrose Alli University,
P.M.B. 14, Ekpoma,
Edo State, Nigeria.
elvis.imafidon@aauekpoma.edu.ng;

Abstract

Albinism is a global public health issue but it assumes a peculiar nature in the African continent due, in part, to the social stigma faced by persons with albinism (PWAs) in Africa. I argue that there are two essential reasons for this precarious situation. First, in the African consciousness, albinism is an alterity or otherness. The PWA in Africa is not merely a physical other but also an ontological other in the African community of beings, which provides a hermeneutic for the stigmatising separateness or difference of the PWA. The second reason hinges on a distinction drawn by Jürgen Habermas between the ethical point of view and the moral point of view. While the former consists of the ethos, customs, or idea of the good shared by a group of persons with a shared tradition or way of life, the latter consists of what is good for all and transcends particular traditions or ways of life. Consequently, the African ethical point of view, the ethics of solidarity, justifies within the African worldview the established alterity and, by implication, stigmatization of PWAs. On this view, actions that promote harmony and prevent discord and disequilibrium among *accepted* beings in the African community are permissible. I further show that unless there is a change in the physical and ontological conception of PWAs and a leap from the ethical point of view to the moral point of view, the negative attitudes toward PWAs will not change. The leap to the moral point of view does not suggest an abandonment of the ethical point of view but only recommends that the two meet halfway in respect for universally accepted norms of human actions. To achieve this, I will show that much needs to be done in the areas of policy formulation, law, health care services, and education.

Keywords: Albinism, persons with albinism, African ontology, otherness, ethical, moral

Introduction

The popularity and perceived acceptance and assimilation of the 18th century poet William Cowper's dictum, 'variety is the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour' tend to suggest that people everywhere are favourably disposed toward forms and varieties, difference and otherness of all sorts. But beyond the perceived theoretical assimilation by very many of this poetic

rendering of otherness, real life experiences show that many are scared, unable to cope with and unwilling to accept anything that is different or unusual from the status quo. Many are unable to try a new dish different from what they are used to. Many racial, religious, and ethnic fundamentalisms are often borne out of hostility toward something different. A white man who stumbles on a dark-skinned man in a shopping mall in an essentially white community somewhere in Dresden, Germany, may become irritated and even scared. Villagers in a typical sub-Saharan African community may look in awe and the kids may run for safety when they see a white-skinned man, be it a Caucasian or a person with albinism (PWA).

These instances point to a subtle but strongly entrenched feeling of fear and uneasiness in human consciousness when it experiences something different from the ordinary. In order to protect the normalcy of things, societies manage to establish and promote ideologies and structures that sustain the status quo. Although the society may have good reasons for doing this, such an attitude may at times become inimical to understanding and fulfilling one's responsibility toward the other.

My primary interest in this article is to explore how the uneasiness and the consequent indifference about the other play out on the African continent with particular attention to albinism. I am particularly interested in showing how the African community has managed to establish and promote ontological and normative ideologies that help sustain the (ill) treatment of persons with albinism as an other. In the first section, I argue that in African ontology, albinism is considered an alterity or otherness. The person with albinism in Africa is not merely a physical other, she or he is an ontological other in the African community of beings, and as I will show, this provides an explanation for the stigmatising separateness or difference of the person with albinism from the African community of beings. I will show further in section two that the

African ethical point of view, the ethics of solidarity, also forms the basis for the justification within the African worldview for the established alterity and, by implication, stigmatization of persons with albinism. By this view, actions that promote harmony and prevent discord and disequilibrium among *accepted* beings in the African community are permissible. To this extent, I argue that treating or isolating an other (such as a person with albinism or leprosy, a morally bankrupt or evil person, or a contagiously ill person) from the community of beings is permissible, insofar as it protects the status quo.

The established perception of albinism as an other, as will be shown in first two sections, makes it very difficult for any meaningful progress to be achieved in the research and successful management of albinism on the continent. Unless there is a change in the physical or ontological conception of persons with albinism, and unless there is a leap from the ethical point of view to the moral point of view, the precarious situations faced by persons with albinism will not change and only very little success will be recorded in the area of research and management. Since the solution I intend to explore depends on the moral-ethical distinction, section three focuses on clarifying the distinction, stating clearly the senses in which the terminologies are employed in my discourse. In section four, I explore and analyse more fully what I consider to be a leap to the moral point of view in coping with the problems of albinism on the African continent. In section five, I highlight what I consider to be the key roles of stakeholders in achieving this much needed leap. I conclude that very urgent and drastic theoretical and practical steps need to be taken to successfully manage the problems associated with albinism in Africa.

Albinism as an other in African ontology

In recent human history, there has been much fascination and interest in the concept of otherness. Difference or alterity in scholarly circles has cut across areas such as anthropology, theology, philosophy, and politics. In the midst of all the talk about the other, what remains challenging, as with all essentially contested concepts, is what exactly is meant by otherness or alterity. Specifically, in philosophical circles, one can find disparities among such renowned scholars as Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan on what or who the other is. Should we, for instance, go with Derrida's 'difference', Lacan's 'unconscious', Foucault's 'marginalised discourse', Levinas's 'ethics of the other', Habermas's ethical point of view, or Kristeva's 'feminine semiosis'? (see [1, p. 61]). As much as these discourses have been very important in shaping the current understanding and use of the concept, I will try to avoid the quite rough terrain of discourse with all its tricky terminologies and lines of argument. In the context of this article, I think it is safer to stick to a quite simple, ordinary definition of the other: otherness or alterity refers to the quality of being different, unusual, or alien from the conscious self or a particular cultural orientation. The other is therefore what is different from the status quo. In a basket full of green apples, the single red apple in the same basket clearly stands out as the other. Bearing this in mind, I can now proceed with a discourse on the conceptualisation of albinism as an other in African ontology.

There is such abundance of literature today on African ontology and metaphysics that I fear it is futile to attempt to make a list here of the books and essays that have explored its nature, major themes, and problems. An extensively discussed notion of African ontology that has become obvious in scholarship is the all-inclusive nature of the African structure of being or view of reality. Polycarp Ikuenobe nicely summarises this perspective in the following lines:

> In the traditional African view, reality or nature is a continuum and a harmonious composite of various elements and forces. Human beings are a harmonious part of

> this composite reality, which is fundamentally, a set of mobile life forces. Natural objects and reality are interlocking forces. Reality always seeks to maintain an equilibrium among the network of elements and life forces.… Because reality or nature is a continuum, there is no conceptual or interactive gap between the human self, community, the dead, spiritual or metaphysical entities and the phenomenal world; they are interrelated, they interact, and in some sense, one is an extension of the other. [2, pp. 63-64]

The web of relationship existing among all entities, corporeal and non-corporeal, is made possible by what Placide Tempels has described as a vital force in his analysis of Bantu ontology [3]. Plumey explains that force is the 'energy of cosmic origin that permeates and lives within all that is—human beings, animals, plants, minerals, and objects, as well as events. This common energy shared by all confers a common essence to everything in the world, and thus ensures the fundamental unity of all that exists…. This energy constitutes the active, dynamic principle that animates creation, and which can be identified as life itself' [4, p. 24]. Therefore, the principle of ontological unity, the basic substratum of African reality, force, makes possible the interrelatedness of entities in the African community of beings.

African scholars pride themselves on the all-inclusive nature of African ontology. It is now seen as a fertile ground for sowing the best seeds for solidaristic and reciprocal living, ideal environmental ethical principles, ideal business ethical principles, and even improved health care services. With the promises of such an inclusive ontology, scholars may quickly forget that as interconnected and interlocked as the African community of beings may be, it still excludes a number of beings or entities. The basic reason for this is to protect the socially approved web of relationships from anything that may threaten its harmony and equilibrium. For instance, some have wondered what justification may be given for the stigmatisation against victims of deadly, contagious, and (previously) incurable diseases in African traditions. This certainly is for obvious reasons. Any human community, African or non-African, no matter how intact and

closely knit it may be, would want to protect itself from extinction, which will imply discriminating against and isolating anyone or anything that may threaten its existence [5, pp. 27-48]. Interestingly, in African traditions, not only persons with deadly, contagious, and (previously) incurable diseases are isolated from the community of beings; even morally bankrupt persons who do not live up to the expectations of the community are isolated to protect the community. This explains the reasons for banishment and ostracism.

Beyond physically ill and morally bankrupt persons, African ontology isolates some other beings due to their unusual nature; they are treated as the other, different, unusual, and hence, excluded from the community of accepted beings. The list varies from one African community to the other. Persons with albinism, twins, triplets, and the like, and persons with deformities will make this list although with some variations from community to community (see [6, 7]). In some extreme cases of African traditions, when such persons are born, they are either killed or thrown away in the evil forest as they do not make the list of accepted beings. In some milder cases, ideologies are created to explain the nature of such excluded beings, and how exclusion is necessary to protect the community of beings from an alleged contamination. For instance, Rattray says about the Ghanaians that infants born with six fingers were killed upon birth [6, p. 9]. Danquah adds that severely retarded infants were abandoned close to water bodies based on the belief that they could return to their kind [6, p. 9]. In the present discourse, I will pay closer attention to albinism.

In the densely black populated African communities, a person with albinism is generally considered as an other, a different and an unusual entity, not as a human being. The manner in which this ideology is perpetuated varies from one region to the other. Tanzania and a large part of East and Central Africa, for instance, have become notoriously known for their ideologies of

persons with albinism, which justifies the perpetuation of violence and discrimination against such persons. As Muromi explains:

> persons with albinism are considered to simply vanish. In Tanzania, they are referred to as apes and a source of money. They are seen as sorcerers, devils or persons suffering from a curse and, in some communities, it is believed that contact with them will bring bad luck, sickness or death. Other frequent myths … include: that sexual intercourse with a woman or a girl with albinism can cure HIV/AIDS; that the sacrifice of persons with albinism can appease 'the god of the mountain' when a volcano starts to erupt; or that pulling out the hair of a person with albinism brings good luck. It has been reported that miners use the bones of persons with albinism as amulets or bury them where they are drilling for gold, and that fishermen weave the hair of persons with albinism into their nets to improve their catches. This range of beliefs and superstitions leads to various forms of attacks against persons with albinism in many communities. [8, p. 323]

The UK Daily Mail Newspaper of September 25, 2009, reported a gruesome killing of a five-year old girl with albinism, Mariam Emmanuel, in Tanzania on the basis that she was a ghost. The journalist Andrew Malone reported the sad and painful story thus:

> Like a hunted animal runs to ground, the little girl was cornered. Branded a 'ghost' on account of her striking white skin, Mariam Emmanuel had been chased through her village, in a remote corner of Tanzania, by a bloodthirsty mob. Exhausted and terrified, the five year old slumped in the dust at the end of an alley. She whimpered and cowered while the adults surrounded her and sharpened their knives and machetes. Then they set to work, butchering her and dividing her remains between themselves. She was killed like an animal, by grown men who showed no compassion for another human being. Mariam's crime? She was an albino. (As quoted in [9])

In Nigeria, the situation is not so different. In one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba tradition, persons with albinism are considered as non-human beings but spirit beings who should best serve in the shrines of the divinities as they are considered sacred. Well, one would expect that a being considered sacred would not be treated as an other or discriminated against within such a tradition. But persons with albinism are often referred to as *afin* by the Yorubas, a word meaning 'horrible' [10, p. 49]. The situation is not different in South Africa. Persons with albinism are discriminated against and they face both emotional and physical

challenges. In South Africa, such persons are now faced with the challenge of coping with being hunted for their body parts [11, p. 79; 12, pp. 25-27]. In Malawi and Zambia, babies born with albinism are seen as ghosts of dead persons returned as white babies. Young children are told stories to scare them from coming close to such 'white babies'. They are told that if they look at such babies, they could disappear and that the babies are ghosts. Parents of babies with albinism are made to leave the community by the elders because these elders are convinced that the presence of such babies indicates some problems in the parents' relationship with supernatural beings [13].

Space constraints prevent me from mentioning more instances of the ontological otherness of persons with albinism in African traditions. Such stories and reports already saturate the World Wide Web, and a simple search provides more information than one may ever need on the subject matter.[1] But what is clear from the foregoing and from the bulk of available information is that the person with albinism is not just a physical other within the African worldview but also considered to be ontologically different from fellow human beings, and that the ideological description of this difference forms the basis for the various forms of discrimination, stigmatisation, and violence against the person. This scenario is complicated once more by the ethics of African traditions.

The ethical basis of the otherness of PWA in African traditions

When Mariam Emmanuel was butchered like an animal, did her killers believe they had acted wrongly? There are no indications that they and all those who harm and ridicule persons with

[1] There is a comprehensive list of dozens of well-researched articles (with access) on the beliefs and attitude toward persons with albinism in different parts of Africa in [14]. What is clear from the many essays on this site is that the person with albinism is considered to be different from the others in his environment and is so treated.

albinism believe they have done something wrong. In fact, there seem to be a strong conviction in their minds that persons with albinism deserve the ill-treatment done to them because they are not an other towards whom one has some form of responsibility, but a degraded non-human other who is nothing but a threat to the established community of beings. The justification for this conviction is to be found in the ethical point of view upheld in African traditions.

Literature now abounds with reflection on the good in African traditions. Thaddeus Metz gives one of the best theoretical formulations of African ethics in his paper 'Toward an African Moral Theory' [15, pp. 321-341]. Metz formulates an African moral theory thus: 'An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community' [15, p. 334]. In other words, 'what is right is what connects people together; what separates people is wrong' [15, p. 334]. The reason why Metz's formulation is apt, to borrow Setiloane's explanation, is that if the community in African traditions is understood as being inclusive of all lives, and that the success of life is found in the ability to maintain a healthy relationship with all, then, by implication, the moral imperative and contract will be to maintain harmony in the community and to ensure its continuance. The cycle of ritual life is to sustain the wholeness of the community of human beings, nature, and the elements [16, p. 79].

In African traditions, emphasis is placed on communal harmony or equilibrium among beings in the community as a necessary and sufficient factor for survival. As expected, therefore, the primary goal of existence is to establish, maintain, and sustain this communal harmony for the interest and welfare of both the community as a collective whole and individuals within the community. As Ikuenobe explains:

> This idea of harmony or the goal of maintaining harmony for the human good and well-being is therefore the foundation for communalism. This implies the need to

> impose social responsibilities on people in order to rationally perpetuate the relevant traditions and maintain harmony. So, maintaining harmony with the aid of the community is an essential human interest. The idea of pursuing and maintaining human welfare and interests is at the moral centre of communalism and the moral conception of personhood in African traditions. [2, p. 65]

In light of this description of African ethics, it does not seem wrong for members of the all-inclusive community of beings to protect itself against anything that might threaten the equilibrium and harmony in its ontological structure. As noted earlier, the list of excluded beings who are seen as threats to the established structure of the community of beings includes morally bankrupt persons, contagiously ill persons, and, for quite unfounded reasons, twins and persons with albinism.

The ideas in African cultures of the nature of persons with albinism clearly shows that they are seen as a threat to the established structure of being and are thus excluded from that structure. Due mainly to their 'unusual' physical nature, they are seen as not fitting into the community of beings. This justifies all sorts of maltreatment and harm against persons with albinism. For if a human being appears to another person as nothing more than an animal and a threat from that person's ontological and ethical point of view, then the killing of such a human being by that person will be regarded as morally permissible, especially given that the killing or ill-treatment of a threatening animal is not frowned at.

The African ethical point of view, therefore, consciously or unconsciously supports the harm done to persons with albinism and does not frown at such harm essentially because persons with albinism are not considered in the first place as 'persons' but rather as apes, ghosts, sacred animals, horrible creatures, and the like, but not certainly as persons or normal human beings. There is, therefore, the need to critically consider the limitations of the African ethical point of

view from what Habermas calls the moral point of view. But what distinction is there between the ethical and the moral points of view?

The ethical-moral distinction

Can the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' be used at all times in all contexts synonymously without any loss of meaning? The history of ideas shows clearly that the answer is in the negative. Even when we admit that both terms are not necessarily incompatible and have been used (and still are being used in some quarters) synonymously in human history, the existing literature shows that they can assume separate meanings in different contexts. However, scholars also do not agree on the difference between the two terms. In fact, some use the words in almost exactly the opposite way. The differences vary from one school of thought to another.

For instance, the following is the distinction given a long time ago by Paul Weiss: 'Man is moral if he conforms to the established practices and customs of the group in which he is. He is ethical if he voluntarily obligates himself to live in the light of an ideal good.... To be ethical, [men] must voluntarily choose and pursue an ultimate and universal good' [17, pp. 381-382]. On this distinction, morals are socially accepted norms binding on members of a community of selves or a group of persons. Hence, in this sense, we can talk of Christian morality, Occidental morality and African morality. Ethics, on the other hand, would consist of ideal principles of human actions that may have binding effects on all rational persons, in any culture or society, who deliberately understand and accept those principles, such as the golden rule, principles of equity, and the principle of fairness and justice.

Irving Louis Horowitz distinguishes the ethical from the moral differently. While the ethical consists of changing moral attitudes, the moral consists of fixed moral norms [18, p. 107].

Put differently, the ethical consists of empirically observable human conduct as they present themselves in one society or group or another, that is, they are standards of conducts in particular systems. The moral on the other hand consists of universal norms that are essential for the appraisal of paradoxes and dilemma in human conduct emerging from a particular ethical (existential) standpoint [18, p. 105]. The moral point of view, therefore, transcends particular systems of conduct and attempts to evaluate the rational adequacy of such particular systems of conduct.

Obviously, Weiss and Horowitz each offer a different distinction of the moral and the ethical. The latter is a reversal of the former. The two views represent the two most common distinctions between the ethical and the moral in the scholarly literature. However, for my purposes, Horowitz's distinction works better, not because it is more correct than the other—there is certainly no easy way of reaching such a conclusion—but mainly because it carries with it the substance and contents of the distinction I have in mind. Here, I therefore stick to the common but contested distinction between the Greek *ethikos* as customs of behaviour of a people and the Latin *moralis* as principles of evaluation of human actions.

The ethical-moral distinction I insist on drawing is akin to the distinction Jürgen Habermas draws between the ethical point of view and the moral point of view [19, pp. 98-105]. For Habermas, the ethical point of view concerns what is good for a group of persons in a particular tradition or way of life. But the moral point of view concerns what is equally good for all, and as such, not relative to a particular subject history. Moral reasons, for Habermas, override ethical ones. The emphasis should thus be on moral and rational self-legislation rather than ethical self-expression. The moral point of view is egalitarian and potentially universal, and it is possible to reach a rational consensus on moral questions, at least in theory. Ethical reasons,

in contrast, always and at least in part are relative to a particular individual or collective subject, and thus there is a limit to their public use. But this does not mean that the moral point of view is neutral. It has normative implications because it is internally related to a concept of autonomy as rational self-legislation. Yet, since this concept of autonomy is mediated by the public use of reason—as rational self-legislation—it is not just one (ethical) value among others, but neutral in relation to different ethical values [20, pp. 442-443].

The moral point of view highlights the fact that we are all humans and part of a universal community of selves sharing similar interests and needs, to the extent that genuine interests can be defended or redeemed publicly and discursively by use of reason that does not harbour indefensible assumptions that are peculiar to a particular form of life. For common humanity, the moral point of view is therefore much more essential than the ethical point of view [21, ch. 1]. Our goal must always be to conform our ethical viewpoints to the moral viewpoint. But does this not trivialise or even deny the importance of the ethical point of view? Why should we in the first place take a leap toward the moral point of view if we are satisfied with the ethical standards in our particular forms of life? I now turn to exploring the necessity of a leap toward the moral point of view, and why the leap is important for dealing with the challenges of albinism in Africa.

The leap to the moral point of view

It is unrealistic to deny that there are many different value orientations in the world today and that people and cultures of the world today hold quite different views of what is good or right, bad or wrong. The moral point of view, which lays claim to universality, makes possible the production of norms and principles of well-ordered interpersonal relations through the exercise

of reason, while not necessarily disregarding or trampling on ethical points of view [21, ch. 1]. Rather, it invites ethical points of view to continue to enter into the process of rational deliberation. A person must be willing to subject his or her ethical point of view to the process of rational deliberation in order to validate it [21, ch. 1]. The ethical viewpoints, forms of life, traditions, and cultural values through which people make their lives meaningful must be of such forms that they do not violate rationally justifiable universalistic principles of human welfare [22, p. 130]. They must reflect emancipatory tendencies, principles of equality and liberty, and must proceed on the taken-for-granted belief that the goal of any moral norm is human welfare, although always leaving open the question of what constitutes that welfare.

One reason for why it is very important that traditions and cultures take a leap toward the moral point of view is that many ethical points of view, when subjected to rational evaluation, are often found rationally inadequate, for they have not been built on rational considerations per say. Allegiance to conventions, religion, superstitions, and emotions has been a more potent factor than reason in the building of ethical points of view [23, p. 459]. Think, for instance, about the ethical point of view supporting the stigmatization and inhuman/inhumane treatment of PWA it is built virtually on superstitions, fear, emotions, religious beliefs, taboos and rituals, and conventions, but hardly on reason.

The moral point of view invites us to subject such ethical standards to rational principles of evaluation. Those that survive the rational process of evaluation, those that conform to the dictates of reason rather than, say, emotions, fear, superstitions, and religious taboos and rituals, are permissible to the extent that they are, at least in principle, good for all. In fact, their survival of a rational evaluation makes them stronger, firmer, and more acceptable even across borders.

We see the importance of the moral point of view over the ethical point of view clearly in Kantian ethics. Kant's moral philosophy, mainly contained in *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, is an attempt to construct moral principles that are inherently right or wrong apart from any particular circumstances. Such moral principles can immediately be recognised as true and binding regardless of social context. Kantian moral principles, therefore, necessarily include the principle of universality, the principle of humanity as an end (and never as a means) and the principle of autonomy [24, pp. 120-126]. For instance, the principle of autonomy holds that the moral law that we obey ought not to be imposed on us externally, say, from culture or religion. Rather, we ought to impose the moral law on ourselves because we are convinced through the exercise of reason that it is right or good. 'The sense of duty and the reason that we obey come from within; they are expressions of our higher selves' [24, p. 126].

Flowing from this background, Africans in general must avoid hiding behind the veil of the ethical viewpoint to perpetuate and justify harmful conduct against persons with albinism on the continent. They need to take the leap toward the moral point of view and deliberately exercise the power of reason to evaluate their beliefs, ideologies, and notions about persons with albinism. In subjecting the ethical viewpoints to reason, which is the fuel for the moral viewpoint, only those norms that can be validated by the free and public use of reason will stand. For on what rational basis can an individual or a society justify, defend, or validate the claim, for instance, that due to the 'unusual' nature of a person, it is right to ostracize, murder, or maltreat such a person.

The moment Africans begin to imbibe the moral point of view and to get rid of ethical viewpoints that are rationally indefensible, humanistic and universalistic moral principles that

will protect not only persons with albinism but also other threatened and vulnerable populations will flourish. Such moral principles include principles of autonomy, beneficence, justice, honesty, fairness, equity, respect for inalienable human rights, and the Kantian principle of humanity as an end. For instance, the Kantian principle of humanity as an end means simply that one should:

> Act so as to use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always as an end, never as merely a means." This principle has received more widespread approval than any other part of Kant's moral philosophy. People, as rational beings, are ends in themselves and should never be used merely as means to other ends. We may use physical things as means, but when we use people simply as means, as in slavery, prostitution, or commercial exploitation, we degrade them and violate their innermost beings as people. [24, p. 126]

Following this principle, a person with albinism will at no time be seen as a means to such ends as protection from witchcraft, cure from HIV/AIDS, and moneymaking.

It is important to point out quickly at this junction that the preference for the moral point of view does not in any way indicate that the principles that emanate from the moral point of view are foolproof and without limitations. A number of dilemmas and limitations evolve in our reliance on these moral principles, for nothing that evolves from the rational deliberation of persons is perfect and without need of modification and revision. In fact, we progress because we can improve on past errors. The main reason for the preference for these moral principles over ethical principles is that they are more human focussed rather than culture or community focussed. Beyond protecting and sustaining a specific society or community, these moral principles are primarily focussed on protecting and sustaining humanity as a whole.

But it is not enough to have a seat at and to participate in an academic forum, and to know in theory that part of what urgently needs to be done to deal with the menace is to take a leap from the ethical to the moral point of view. The message must reach the very common man

or woman on the street who, due to conventions and fear of the unknown, partake in the hacking and butchering of persons with albinism; it must be seated at the very heart of the young lady who just gave birth to a baby with albinism, and, due to fear of the community and its ideologies, is already fashioning out the best way to get rid of the precious gift of life; it must reach the fisherperson who seems convinced that all he needs to catch more fish is the hair of a person with albinism; it must reach the ritualist, the witchdoctor, and the little kid on the street who is scared when she or he sees a person with albinism, and, even when not scared, chants songs of mockery and insults that bring tears to the eyes of the person with albinism. To get the message out across board, all hands need to be on deck.

The role of stakeholders

Interestingly, many stakeholders are already involved in pushing forward the much needed leap towards achieving the much needed attitudinal change in the perception and treatment of persons with albinism in Africa. Government and non-governmental agencies, health workers, scholars, researchers and teachers, custodians of culture, and every other African person, be it a student, an employee, an employer of labour, a farmer, a trader, a parent, or a fisherperson, are all stakeholders with roles to play. Government and non-governmental agencies (including those primarily focussed on caring for persons with albinism, such as the Albino Foundations) should be particularly more stern and proactive in dealing with the ideological basis (ontological and normative) for the ill-treatment of persons with albinism. To be sure, governments have the function of protecting and respecting the culture of their citizenry. But when aspects of a culture tend to be inimical to the wellbeing of a certain group of persons and fail to take the much desired leap to the moral point of view, the government, through its agencies and through the

enactment and formation of policy, need to enforce compliance with more humane and universal norms of human action which are essential to protecting the wellbeing of all groups, including the vulnerable ones in society. The Tanzanian government, in collaboration with non-governmental and human rights organisation, has taken such steps in the past, for instance, by arresting hundreds of witchdoctors who encouraged the killings of persons with albinism. But such efforts need to be thorough and sustained without bias and favouritism.

Health workers occupy a strategic place in caring for persons with albinism in Africa. From the moment a child with albinism is born, through that child's stages of growth to maturity, health workers have indispensable roles to play, much greater than the roles they are currently able to play. Counselling centres need to be established in all health centres in order to educate and orient parents of newly born and growing children with albinism by providing clear explanations for albinism, explaining important facts for caring for a person with albinism, dispelling superstitious beliefs and ideas, counselling the troubled parents, and dispelling their fears. At the moment, counselling centres devoted to the care of persons with albinism and to the counselling of their primary caregivers are to a large extent absent in African hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare centres. Unfortunately, many healthcare workers who ought to be knowledgeable about the nature, causes, prevention, and management of albinism are culpable in the ill treatment of persons with albinism. Although well trained in their field and aware of the reasons for the albinism condition, many are still trapped in the web of cultural ideologies and have failed to shed parochial ethical viewpoints. As a result, health workers often cannot contribute meaningfully to improving the situation. They need to wilfully, or by compulsion through government involvement if necessary, abandon narrow ideologies and ethical standpoints and play useful roles in ameliorating the situation.

Many are ignorant, lacking the most basic knowledge and information about albinism. This lack of factual knowledge, and the acceptance of false ideologies instead, is fuel for the current quagmire. Much needs to be done in the area of interdisciplinary research, sensitization, and effective dissemination of information. Scholars should be willing to engage in thorough and groundbreaking research on the causes and management of the condition. For instance, there is need for thorough dermatological research on behalf of persons with albinism that can provide answers to questions such as, 'what kind of cream should a person with albinism use?' or 'what kind of medical examination should a person with albinism frequently go through to forestall other health hazards such as skin cancer?' There is even need for research on fashion and appropriate dress. What kind of clothing, in terms of style and material, can a person with albinism put on so as to enjoy both the aesthetic and health benefits of clothing? Such questions signify that the manner of research needed is interdisciplinary and comprehensive.

To achieve this, much is needed in the area of research funding, seminar and conference organisation, and the establishment of institutes and research centres with a primary focus on albinism. A project I am working on, for instance, is the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Albinism in Africa. If successful, it will be a research centre on albinism with presence at some select institutions and universities in Africa. Its primary goal will include organising interdisciplinary bi-annual conferences on albinism, funding graduate research on various aspects of albinism—such as social cultural, medical, educational, economic, and aesthetic—and working hand-in-hand with other agencies in disseminating information about albinism. But the primary problems in achieving such a daunting task, of course, are funding, staffing, and organisation.

Culture ought to be dynamic and amenable to modification when the need arises. If a culture is static, aspects of it gradually become anachronistic and less useful in the ordering of human society. Unfortunately, African cultures tend to drift toward anachronism as Kwasi Wiredu has long recognised [25, pp. 1-3]. The custodian of the cultures and traditions of the African peoples who are seen as possessing the required epistemic conditions and authority to distinguish between what is taken to be right or wrong, good or bad within the African framework of thought, and who are believed to have a better grasp and experience of the norms, precepts, assumptions, and beliefs that form the traditions of the people, are wont to defend and protect that same tradition even when some aspects become anachronistic and rationally indefensible. The common and easy defence often given is that the practice is the tradition of the people; it has always been that way and it should remain that way whether or not it is rationally defensible. Such an attitude needs to change because it will otherwise end up killing the culture and making it lose its relevance. Custodians of culture should be willing to take the very first steps to revising aspects of culture from time to time and to ensure that they protect the welfare of all in the community. It is time that the custodians of cultures in African communities looked critically at some of the ontological and ethical frameworks that are antithetical to the wellbeing of persons with albinism and other physically challenged and vulnerable persons in such communities.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to locate the deep-seated causes of the challenges faced by persons with albinism in Africa, and to explain how, due to their deep-seated nature in the (sub) consciousness of very many African minds, they remain the bane to achieving any meaningful

success in the areas of research and management. The deep-seated causes that I have emphasized as foundational to the challenges are the perception of the person with albinism as an unusual (non-human) being, an ontological other who does not fit within (and is thus excluded from) the structure of beings, and the ethical points of view that justify the ill-treatment of persons with albinism. By implication, as I have also attempted to show, the solution to this problem must also be deep-seated, aimed at encouraging and compelling a much needed change in the mentality of many Africans. This surely requires that all stakeholders take urgent and drastic measures.

Africans are often depicted as hospitable, loving, and united as a people. Scholars have long theorized and lauded the communalistic spirit present in African communities, particularly when compared with the rapid growth of individualistic lifestyles globally. In fact, Africans, both scholars and ordinary people on the street, pride themselves as possessing the spirit of Ubuntu. Although a widely discussed and variedly interpreted concept, Ubuntu recognizes people's dependence on one another and stands for the most essential virtues of humanity: compassion, kindness, and hospitality. But there is a large gap between theory and praxis, one yet to be bridged properly and one that calls into question our commitment as Africans to Ubuntu. The gap is evidenced in the manner in which we treat the other—be it a person with albinism or someone with a strange illness—the manner in which we protect our communities of beings even when doing so results in xenophobic feelings against our own ancestral brothers, and the manner in which we quickly forget our similarities and focus on our differences. Hospitality and kindness are best felt and are more meaningful when extended to strangers as a call to become a friend rather than an enemy. Its primary aim is not to change the stranger or the other and to compel him or her to become one of us. It is to create a space for the other to flourish and to be happy. If Africans pride themselves on their hospitality and humaneness without being able to

extend them to those they consider to be an other, then there is really nothing worth being proud of.

References

1. Handelman, S. 1990. Facing the other: Levinas, Perelman and Rosenweig. *Religion and literature* 22(2/3): 61-84.
2. Ikuenobe, P. 2006. *Philosophical perspective on communalism and morality in African traditions.* Lanham: Lexington Books.
3. Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu philosophy.* Paris: Presence Africaine.
4. Plumey, J.M. 1975. The cosmology of ancient Egypt. In *Ancient cosmologies*, eds. C. Blacker and M. Loewe, 17-41. London: George Allen & Unwin.
5. Aigbodioh, J.A. 2011. Stigmatisation in African communalistic societies and Habermas' theory of rationality. *Cultura: International Journal of the Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 8(1): 27-48.
6. Munyi, C.W. 2012. Past and present perceptions toward disability: A historical perspective. *Disability Studies Quarterly* 32(2), DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v32i2.3197
7. Anoaka, J.B. 1975. *Division of rehabilitation status report.* Ghana: Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Community.
8. Muromi, S. 2014. Violence against persons with albinism and older women: Tackling witchraft accusation in Tanzania. *International Journal of Education and Research* 2(6): 323-338.

9. Baker, C. 2011. *Representing the tribe of ghosts: Stereotypes of albinism emerging from reports of recent attacks in Tanzania and Burundi*. www.inter-disciplinary.net>bakerwpaper. Accessed September 9, 2015.
10. Olagunju, O.S. 2012. Toward a biblical response to myth and discrimination against the human right of albinos in Yorubaland. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences* 1(1): 46-58.
11. Cruz-Inigo, A.E., B. Ladizinski, and A. Sethi. 2011. Albinism in Africa: Stigma, slaughter and awareness campaigns. *Clinical Dermatology* 29(1): 79-87.
12. Msela, M., and M. Nothling-Slabbert. 2013. Colour discrimination against persons with albinism in South Africa. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 6(1): 25-27.
13. Nyirenda, M. 2003. Stories about albinism in Malawi: An 'intruder' in my village. Ed. P. Lund. AIMZ: Albinism in Malawi and Zambia. https://curve.coventry.ac.uk/open/file/d705b262-eb71-454b-acea-6c2889f56ac2/1/stories%20about%20albinism.pdf. Accessed August 14, 2015.
14. Albinism in Africa. n.d. Publications. http://albinism-in-africa.com/?page_id=563. Accessed October 12, 2015.
15. Metz, T. 2007. Toward an African moral theory. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15(3): 321-341.
16. Setiloane, G. 1998. Towards a Biocentric theology and ethics—via Africa. In *Faith, science, and African culture: African cosmology and Africa's contribution to science*, ed. C.W. Du-Toit, 73-84. Pretoria: UNISA.
17. Weiss, P. 1942. Morality and ethics. *Journal of Philosophy* 39(14): 381-385.
18. Horowitz, I.L. 1958. The moral and the ethical. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 19(1): 104-107.

19. Habermas, J. 1990. *Moral consciousness and communicative action.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

20. Thomassen, L. 2006. The inclusion of the other: Habermas and the paradox of tolerance. *Political Theory* 34(4): 439-462.

21. Habermas, J. 1998. *The inclusion of the other: Studies in political theory.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

22. Warnke, G. 1995. Communicative rationality and cultural values. In *The Cambridge companion to Habermas*, ed. S.K. White, 120-142. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

23. Lee, H.N. 1928. Morals, morality and ethics: Suggested terminology. *International Journal of Ethics* 38(4): 450-466.

24. Titus, H., M. Smith, and R. Nolan. 1994. *Living issues in philosophy*. 9th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

25. Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.